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## NORTHERNERS COUNT- ING BLACK ELEPHANTS: ON SAFARI WITH LIVE 8 AND G 8

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## **NORTHERNERS COUNTING BLACK ELEPHANTS: ON SAFARI WITH LIVE 8 AND G 8**

### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose** – To demonstrate the inadequacy of traditional concepts of accountability and corporate governance for global gifting relationships, as exemplified in the Live 8 and G 8 events. An alternative construct of value in exchange is proposed.

**Design / Methodology / Approach** – A discussion paper using a literature based analysis and critique.

**Findings** – Accounting avoids social responsibility by denying culturally determined legitimate meanings of value other than those constructed from an economic perspective. New accountability and corporate governance mechanisms are needed for donor/recipient relationships.

**Research limitations / Implications** – The arguments advanced should be further explored in alternate empirical instances, and examined in alternate cultural contexts to give a greater depth of understanding.

**Originality/ value** - The paper calls into question the adequacy of accountability concepts in a globalized environment. The paper is a unique contribution to the literature in its application of gifting theory and Baudrillard's theory of simulacra to not for profit and public sector institutions.

**Keywords** – accountability, corporate governance, G 8, gifting, Live 8, simulacra.

## 1. Introduction

An examination of two political events, the Live 8 concert held on 2 July 2005 and its associated **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY**[1] movement, and the G 8 summit held at Gleneagles, Scotland in the United Kingdom on 6 July 2005, both of which made attempts to rectify the injustice of poverty in Africa, provide a poignant narrative from which to demonstrate the inadequacy of accountability and corporate governance concepts in affecting justice in global wealth distribution. These two events are an extreme manifestation of the moral geography of the Northern vox populi pitted against the globalization of markets manifesto of the G 8 machine, both of which rhetorically claim as their mission the elimination of poverty through a just allocation of resources globally. Much consternation of the two events was forthcoming around the remoteness of the events both geographically and culturally from the forty seven countries comprising the African continent [2]. Both the 2005 Live 8 concert and G 8 summit are recognized as momentous high impact events which attempted to transform wealth distribution. However, both attracted criticism from their intended recipients. African leaders said that the concerts were a pointless exercise, while aid groups working in Africa claimed the effort was misguided and a gimmick (Epstein 2005). Comments directed at both events by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni stated “Those Northerners in suits could do some good if they understood the issues well. I have heard recently they have been talking of aid. They are talking of debt forgiveness. These are short-term palliatives, short-term painkillers. The real medicine is trade access, to open up their markets for our products” (Epstein 2005). Sibuele Sibaca, a then 21 year old South African stated “The whole of the world sees Africa as this basket case... We want the whole world to know that we want to be part of the solution” (Burkeman 2005).

The discourse emanating from these comments on debt forgiveness, resource allocation and trade access is couched in concepts of accounting and accountability. The *Australian Statement of Accounting Concepts (SAC) 2 Objective of General Purpose Financial Reporting* (CPA Australia 2007), demonstrates that both historical and contemporary views of accounting use the rhetoric of its role as enabling an efficient and effective allocation of scarce resources. Bryer (1997) argues that double entry bookkeeping was associated with specific risks in evaluating assets and liabilities, as part of capital accumulation and resource allocation. The double entry calculus, when representing debt, requires reciprocity from its recipient be recorded. That is, a debtor is represented as an asset in the books of the creditor, and repayment or reciprocity is assumed in full. Only economic aspects of the debtor creditor relationship are represented. This is problematic for gifting relationships such as debt forgiveness, as is demonstrated in this paper.

What is now known as the G 8 was first formed in November 1975 in Rambouillet France. The heads of state or government of the then six founder countries met, identifying themselves as major industrial democracies and in doing so inferring a moral imperative. Now the G 8 is a group of eight advanced industrial nations, whose heads of government meet annually, and their representatives known as “sherpas” meet more often, to discuss what they define as important economic, financial and political issues. The group currently comprises as full members the United States of America, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada and Russia. The Live 8 organisation on 2 July 2005 held a series of ten simultaneous concerts

across the continents of the G 8 nations and South Africa, organised by Sir Bob Geldof. Tickets were distributed free of charge by phone ballot (Coates 2005), and over one thousand musicians performed without fee. For the first time such an event did not have as its objective to raise money, but to raise political awareness and influence corporate agendas and the agenda of the G 8. The event was facilitated by numerous corporate “partners” or sponsors including the major sponsors Volvo, AOL, Times Warner, various telephone companies, and Coca Cola. The concerts were broadcast across 182 television networks and two thousand radio stations. These concerts preceded the conference and summit of the G 8 at Gleneagles Hotel, Perthshire Scotland on 6-8 July 2005. The concerts were also timed to coincide with two events, first the 20 year anniversary of Live Aid [3], and secondly to run parallel with the United Kingdom’s **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign and the associated “freedom march” called *The Long Walk to Justice*, also held on 2 July 2005. Both events would not have been possible without the cooperation of the global corporate sector, for whom the events afforded the opportunity to align their images with the ideas of democracy and economic freedom. These events too are conceptually unified by a subtext of the measurement and allocation of scarce resources, and accountability to aid agendas and for aid disbursements.

Accordingly, why, in such a crucial debate about solving the allocation of scarce resources to Africa where the very real consequences of failure are starved peoples, is the accounting profession and corporate governance academy quiet if accounting itself claims expertise in informing decisions about the measuring and allocation of scarce resources? On the other side of the same coin, why did the general public who were very visibly mobilized into action around these events, not seek the knowledge and skills of the accounting profession in advancing their arguments in either the political or economic arena? These questions are all the more in need of an answer given acceptance of the critical accounting community’s view that accounting is more than a calculative practice and accounting is value-laden, self interested and has a socially constructing element (Tinker *et al*, 1982; Covalleski & Dirsmith, 1988, Hines, 1988). From this perspective, accounting as a measurement device can be construed as complicit in this atrocity of resource misallocation that has led to the abject poverty of many of the citizens of the African continent. Both events call into question the adequacy of accountability concepts in a globalized environment as they affect global wealth distribution.

This paper demonstrates that accountability is constructed from the position of advanced capitalist stages of exchange, and this is inadequate to impartially represent and mediate gifting relationships between advanced and emerging economic states. Such a use of accounting and its constructs of accountability disadvantage the “other” emerging African states (Broadbent, J. 1995) and privilege the political practices of advanced economic states and organizations such as the Live 8 and G 8 events. Current financial accountability has developed for relationships established as a result of market exchanges. It is domiciled in axioms of the private sector and mature capitalist market mechanisms. This paper argues in an era of globalization where private corporations implode into the previously demarcated areas of public sector, not for profit bodies, and lesser developed markets, accountability premised on exchange theory and market economics is limited and potentially harmful. It is argued that applying private sector accountability unquestioningly to gifting

organizations such as Live 8 and G 8 leads to simulacra of accountability rather than an authentic engagement.

The second section of this paper describes the theoretical framework of Baudrillard's stages of simulacra, the theoretical lens used in the paper. The third section will apply this lens to historical developments in concepts of accountability to demonstrate the path of a "Northern"[4] construct of accountability as simulacra to its most advanced stage. The fourth section will analyze accountability in the North, describing the consequences of Northern interactions with African States associated with the Live 8 and G 8 phenomena. In the fifth section an alternate view of gifting to explain accountability relationships is proposed. The sixth section draws conclusions, describing the alternative nature of the accountability that would result from using gifting theory, and its transformation from "Northern" constructs by advanced capitalist states.

## **2. Theoretical Development**

It is proposed that although overtly silent, accounting and accountability is covertly present as an active ideologically biased constituent, privileging economic equivalent exchanges rather than gifting exchanges characterized by disequilibrium in reciprocity. The theoretical lens of Baudrillard's simulacra is used to argue that notions of accountability are derived both historically and from economic exchange theory, and operate as hyper-real simulacra for good accountability in geopolitically diverse moral geographies. Mechanisms of accountability are believed by the masses and gifting communities as valid, and are promoted by the media and are used by institutions.

In this way accountability for organizational relationships involved in providing aid has aligned itself ideologically with existing dominant societal structures of the North. It is argued that emancipation and advancement of accountability beyond the capital dominating private sector comes from challenging the universality of prevailing market belief systems. This theoretical approach is sympathetic with the view of Cooper et al. (2005) who argue that any form of social responsibility accounting, to have impact, needs to be produced outside the mechanisms of the market, be theoretically informed, and be linked to social struggles and groups. The postmodern simulacra concept offers an alternate lens, and also alternate to the Marxist lens offered by Cooper et al (2005).

Arrington and Watkins (2002) argue for the necessity to explain political engagement with accountability through alternative ontological and epistemological stances. In doing so, this paper contributes to the extant accounting literature that uses a Baudrillardian framework, and builds on a theme of examining accountability as simulacra. The application of the Baudrillardian framework has been used in the work of Macintosh et al (2000), Takatera and Sawabe (2000), Baker (2002), and Vollmer (2003). Such a theoretical approach was advocated by Macintosh et al. (2000, p45) who claim "much more in Baudrillard's corpus of literature could be tapped for further understanding of accounting and the issues facing standard setters". This paper applies Baudrillard's concept of simulacra to accountability mechanisms of

public policy and corporate governance associated with gifting and aid relationships as exemplified in the Live 8 and G 8 events of 2005 and their aftermath.

While the limitations of using a post modern framework in accounting studies are acknowledged (Cooper 1997, Arnold 1998, Mattessich 2003) this paper argues that using a theoretical framework that is not derived from neoclassical market mechanisms and that incorporates sensitivity to the political and media environment offers valuable analysis to advance theoretical understandings of accountability. Furthermore, it permits an interrogation of current notions of accountability for public policy, advancing the work called for by Roslender and Dillard (2003).

In Baudrillard's work on systems of representation or signs he sees consumption rather than production as a basis of social order. As discussed below he argues that the meaning given to a sign is self referential and is derived by what the sign does not mean. Each sign has both a signifier such as an image, sound, or a word, and something signified that is its concept or meaning. For example a swimming pool *denotes* its use as an object, for swimming as exercise or recreation. The swimming pool *connotes* a degree of functionalism, wealth, prestige or comfort. The ownership (consumption) of a swimming pool implies a place in a wider social order (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999). The swimming pool is an object which circulates in society as meanings. In this way Baudrillard sees reality as being constituted by signs found in the use of language and text (for example corporate reports). He also proposes that objects and their signs such as associated values and events are constituted historically and discursively (Macintosh et al 2000).

Baudrillard goes on to argue that it is consumption of image that causes objects to be organised and differentiated as signs. Recognising that in capitalist societies all objects are given a value in exchange, Baudrillard added that they are also given in advanced capitalist markets, a symbolic value. A prestige car has both a value in exchange and a status or social distinction. It is the social role that the object plays that gives it a sign value. In this way Baudrillard sees signs as accomplices of capitalism. He argues that capital accumulates until it becomes image, and images mediate social relationships among people. Consumption is a new phase of capitalism for the affluent society. Objects are not just consumed for their function, but rather for their collective meaning as determined by a calculus or network of signs (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999).

Further, Baudrillard proposes that the use of symbols and images as signs of reality has had a progression in history, which he terms *orders of simulacra*. Baudrillard's orders of simulacra chart a progression of the use of signs in language and text in society. Baudrillard argues that these signs first represented, then dominated and then replaced the societal objects that they represent. Signs move from being unproblematic to being "counterfeit" to "masking the absence of a basic reality" (Horrocks and Jevtic 1999, pp106-107). In a post modern culture dominated by media, it is argued all we have are simulations which aren't any more or less real than a reality they simulate.

The symbolic order or feudal era of simulacra is the most simplistic, where a sign or image is the reflection of a basic reality. This is a "good appearance" in its

truthfulness and transparency in representation. Society is organised with signs in a fixed order according to social position, e.g. a peasant could not become a King (Mann 2005). Ontologically there is an independent objective reality.

Secondly follows the “first order of simulacra” also called the counterfeit era. In this era a sign or image masks and distorts a basic reality, this being an “evil appearance”, because the image, rather than being true is distorted and “perverts” or undermines communicating the quality of the reality. Fakes or copies circulate at the same time as original objects. These fakes hope to transcend or set up as a utopian ideal the original.

Following is the production era called the second order of simulacra, or the order of sorcery. In this era the sign or image masks the absence of a basic reality. In this phase the sign is a form of smoke and mirrors, attempting to hide the true reality. It gives the appearance of a reality that is absent, and manufactures an appearance of reality. Objects produced are not counterfeits but are just many copies that are indistinguishable from their original prototype.

The fourth era termed the third order of simulacra bears no relation to reality and is simulacrum, where the image precedes the reality, and its existence does not resemble any reality. It is pure simulation (Baudrillard 1988). Simulations have no original or prototype (think of the computer generated images in movies). These simulations of reality are termed hyper-reality, and information replaces objects as a basis of production (Mann 2005). Hyper-reality occurs when the image or the model anticipates and precedes the reality, and has no real referent but is completely detached (Macintosh et al 2000). Reality no longer has to be rational “since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance” (Baudrillard 1988). It substitutes signs of the real for the real itself. Simulation threatens the difference between reality and imaginary. A state of hyper-reality exists where the image of the sign appears independent of any underpinning reality (Baudrillard 1981, 1983; McGoun 1997; Macintosh et al., 2000; Baker 2002).

Implosion occurs when the distinctions between the differing orders of simulacra become ambiguous. Implosion is inevitable when the boundaries between two ideas or concepts or images become blurred or collapse so that any differences between the two are no longer apparent.

The object accountability as a sign in society has developed over time. Earlier constructs denoted probity, and a calculative practice of reckoning, the management of resources held in trust, and legitimization. The development of limited liability saw accountability as being symbolic of a social capital (Bryer 1997). Today the object accountability connotes a relationship of privileged power of one party over another, status (lower if you are the accountability giver, higher if you are the accountability recipient), wealth and decision making power in society. Accountability in global public policy is an object of consumption with a value in exchange and a symbolic value. Those with perceived accountability have greater access to international trade (accountability’s value in exchange) and have a symbolic value of democratization.

### **3. A Baudrillardian Analysis of Historical Developments of Accountability.**

While the North is acknowledged as being comprised of advanced capitalist states, not all African states have reached this stage of economic development. This is significant because differing stages are characterized by different symbols of accountability. While it is not the intention of this section to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of accountability in the North, watershed stages are identified to demonstrate the development of the symbolic value of accountability alongside economic development. This section discusses the implications of developments in accountability for social capital and for the entity. Developments discussed are the emergence of token systems, the concept of stewardship, the idea of trading beyond subsistence and for profit, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the concept of limited liability and the concept of accountability to gain legitimacy. This is done to demonstrate stages of the symbolic value of accountability, leading to the now hyper-reality of accountability in advanced capitalist states. A subsequent section will discuss the implications of this for the African situation.

#### *3.1 Token Systems*

Schmandt-Besserat (1981) recorded and interpreted the finding of clay tokens dating from 8000 BC at ancient Near and Middle Eastern archaeological sites as early forms of accounting and pre-cursors of modern day writing and numeracy. The work of Schmandt-Besserat links accounting through a progressively more complex token system with the evolution of society from an agricultural or subsistence basis to urban formation and settlement. Schmandt-Besserat believes that increasingly sophisticated accounting was related to the emergence of an elite society controlling the economy of wealth redistribution within increasingly larger communities. Evidence of this, according to Schmandt-Besserat, is three-fold. First a token system was not found in one early Syrian community until it had grown from a small compound to a village some 5 or 6 times its original size. Schmandt-Besserat has surmised that, based on evidence at the site, the emergence of the token system coincided with the evolution of society from an egalitarian community to a structured society including city-states and the use of bureaucracy and administrative processes to oversee the accumulation and use of community resources. Secondly, the increasing complexity of tokens has also been taken as evidence that tokens did not represent property such as sheep or grain but were means of counting such items. Thirdly, the finding of tokens at elaborate burial sites only, adds further weight to the view of a class system where tokens were the province of wealthy and elite members of society.

With the growth in the use of tokens, an increasing sophistication of accounting and accountability was needed. There was an evolution from a small egalitarian community to a structured society. The implications of this for social capital were the beginnings of administrative processes to control the use of community resources via the use of tokens. This brought with it implications for the entity concept in terms of individuals' access to scarce resources being distinct from community access. Tokens indicated items of ownership and facilitated the formation of a class system of wealthy elite. The tokens had both a value in exchange and a symbolic value in a class system. Applying Baudrillard's orders of simulacra, we identify the symbolic value of the tokens as being of the feudal era or "good" appearance of a basic reality. The tokens were a primitive form of symbolic value, representative of a fixed social order developed over time.

### *3.2 Stewardship*

According to Chen (1975) the religious basis of stewardship was premised on the belief that all things were created by God for use by all humans. If ownership of things and property was required in order to use them, then the human owner must use those property rights to satisfy the needs of society as a whole (Chen 1975, p.534). Chen further argued that social responsibility was the primary stewardship function because the “owner of the property” was the steward of God (p.535). Such an early view is embracing of a moral geography, and reciprocity in exchange was not expected to be equivalent, nor assumed to be satisfied in financial terms only. Stewardship was an accountability of the human owner to God and to the whole of society. This is a much broader concept of accountability than a mere financial accountability. The stewardship view of accountability is symbolic of a fixed divine social order, and aligns itself with the symbolic or feudal era, portraying an honest or good appearance of a fixed social order.

### *3.3 Trade for Profit*

With the spread and development of capital where trade was for profit as opposed to subsistence, a survival of the fittest mentality emerged along with a concomitant erosion of the social responsibility aspect of stewardship. In other words, managers were primarily morally responsible to owners of business entities rather than to society at large (Chen 1975 p.537). Such a shift narrowed the focus of accountability from a societal view to an entity view, with accountability being initiated and restricted primarily to economic exchanges. The symbolic value of accountability in this circumstance aligns itself with Baudrillard’s first order of simulacra, or counterfeit era. The purer symbolism of stewardship is distorted from its reality, with the substitution of the owners of business as recipients of accountability symbols are a fake appearance or a perverted representation of a broader view of capital to benefit society. The owners of business proxy in a distorted way being representative of the interests of broader society.

### *3.4 Transition from feudalism to capitalism*

Social responsibility again became an aspect of stewardship with the expansion of business and an increase in the size of business organisations (Chen 1975 p.538). As business entities became larger and more complex, management not only had more power, but more responsibility in that decisions not only impacted on owners, but employees, suppliers, customers and society in general (Chen 1975 p.539). However, such accountability originated in an economic exchange of equivalence, with the underlying assumption that a financial representation of accountability is adequate for society. Such an assumption must be questioned as an adequate form of accountability for global aid relationships, given the allocation of billions of dollars in aid to Africa and the fact that poverty has increased. Such circumstances proffer that there has not been an efficient allocation of resources, that is to say, there has been a failure of corporate governance and accountability within the global village.

In the same manner, the historical origins and evolution of tokens and money and the parallel developments of accounting and market complexity can be seen to dismantle the stewardship ideals as described by Chen (1975) of a moral duty to God to create social justice in distributing scarce resources in society. The use of tokens (money) and its artefact inscriptions (accounting) developed over time as a technology

demanding equivalence in exchanges, drawing those who had command over scarce resources away from an altruistic notion of stewardship.

### *3.5 Limited Liability*

Bryer (2000 a, p.141) and Chiapello (2007, p.275) argue “as capital becomes increasingly socialised, accounting practices evolve progressively, in accordance with Marx’s theory, and double entry bookkeeping not only finally becomes the dominant model, much more importantly is associated with very specific risks for valuing assets and liabilities, so that capitalist profit can be calculated” (Chiapello 2007, p.275). A watershed moment in the development of the concept of accountability was the introduction of limited liability. The 1855 amendment to the United Kingdom Joint Stock Companies Act of 1844 made limited liability widely available. This followed the inquiry of the Mercantile Laws Commission of 1854 (Bryer 1997). The introduction of limited liability meant that the onus of accountability was imposed on a separate independent legal entity created by the abstraction of capital by incorporation (Bryer 1997, p.37).

Bryer (1997, p.38) argues that limited liability created a vision for social capital that allowed an “enfranchisement of capital”, facilitating a right of association and competition on equal terms or freedom of contract with capital. Bryers (1997) argues that this approach is in sympathy with Marx’s critique and development of the views of Adam Smith. Capital was made “social” by middle classes pooling it in joint stock companies and appointing control to managers, believing this gave an equal return for equal capital. In this way limited liability was seen as an attempt to embrace a vision of social capital.

The symbolic accountability attached to limited liability aligns itself with the third order of simulacra or hyper-reality. The existence of the corporate entity does not resemble any reality. Rather, its image as an artificial person has no real referent. The abstraction of accountability given by the corporate form anticipates accountability by a large number of individual investors.

### *3.6 Accountability to gain legitimacy*

Carruthers and Espleland (1991) as cited in Chiapello (2007, p. 272) argue that accountability is offered to obtain legitimacy. They suggest prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century external accountability was not generally required as there was no capitalistic mentality, and so there was little need for legitimacy from society. The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the rise of double entry bookkeeping in the North, as part of the developments of the Renaissance. In keeping with the sensibilities of the Renaissance, the balancing of debits with credits gave legitimacy from the Aristotelian idea of balance. The rise of double entry gave the image of rationality, and suggested that reference to God was not needed for the legitimacy of accounts as was done previously. However, this relied on the numeracy and literacy skills of the users of the accounts. This approach demonstrates the production era or “order of sorcery” of simulacra, because the accounts try to give the appearance of a reality that is absent, that is, give the appearance of a rational economic representation of a process that also embodies non-rational elements, intrinsic in human nature and decision making.

The watershed developments discussed in this section raise a moral issue of the accountability of the individual investors being limited to their investment. Consistent with Bryer (1997) and Chiapello (2007) the accountability is restricted to economic terms and the creation of profit. This raises the question what societal artefacts (tokens) of accountability are in evidence in the allocation of scarce resources in Africa today? All the above developments are related to capitalism and ignore non-economic constructs of accountability characteristic of lesser developed economies and alternate cultural settings.

#### **4. Northern accountability and its consequences for Africa.**

A Northern notion of accountability for invested capital has embedded in it multiple orders of simulacra incumbent upon quantitative symbols of an advanced capitalist position. These are unsympathetic with the alternate symbols of accountability present in an emerging market. Consequently a vacuum emerges making equivalence in transactions meaningless, but instigating a position of implied reciprocity, that is a simulacrum of reciprocity. In these aid relations there is an interaction of advanced capitalist societies with less advanced capitalist societies, creating a crisis of stewardship from the mismatch of accountability needs at different capitalist stages and from differing cultural symbolic meanings construed. Funding pledges and their attached accountability requirements demonstrate the intrinsic complicity of accountability mechanisms in an ideologically biased consumption of accountability symbols.

The cynical catch phrase of the MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY movement: “two, four, six, eight must we really accumulate?” is anathema to both accounting and capitalism as it seeks engagement beyond the solely economic, and is more akin to a broad stewardship view of accountability. As an institutional structure situated in an advanced capitalist state, the movement itself risks being compromised as does the public interest precept of accounting given its geopolitical privileging of an economic elite. From this perspective Live 8 and G 8 reinforce the imperative to prioritise accounting for the public interest. This, however, is problematic.

Identifying the public interest has always been controversial. In an era of globalisation and structured societies presenting new levels of complexity it is problematized even further when it has to be determined who is the public? (Cooper et al. 2005). Given advanced technologies, communications and globalized trade alongside very underdeveloped economies, education and technologies in Africa, is accountability at an entity level or organisational level relevant or sufficient? Ontologically, how can an axiomatic normative framework of accountability legitimately operate when it must serve more than one public interest and so competing interests? Are these public interests competing chronologically or do new technologies make redundant concepts of periods of accountability?

Donated monies are accounted for in the same way as invested capital under Northern constructs of accountability because accounts of how donated monies are used is usually construed to be given by the recipients to the donors. This relationship privileges the donors and uses the economic rationalist metaphor of them being the owners of capital. When donors in such a relationship are corporations, they must act in the Northern sense of corporate accountability, privileging the capital providers

above public interest. However, there is ample evidence that this approach has not worked to date. The discussion following illustrates the failure of Northern accountability in Africa, in terms of the relationship between corruption and the persistence of poverty in Africa.

The general consensus among African development analysts is that foreign aid to Africa has not been effective. For example, between 1980 and 1988, sub-Saharan Africa received \$83 billion in aid. Yet all that aid failed to spur economic growth, arrest Africa's economic atrophy, or promote democracy. Ayittey (1999) reported in testimony before the US House Sub-Committee on Africa that

The statistics on Africa's postcolonial development record are horrifying. In 1985 more than 100 million of Africa's 700 million people lived in abject poverty. This number rose to 216 million in 1990 and is projected to reach 304 million by the year 2000. ...

Four months before Live 8 and G 8, McAllister et al (2005) reported on European initiatives to alleviate poverty in Africa including those prompted by Sir Bob Geldof of Live 8 in consultation with UK Prime Minister and G 8 representative, Tony Blair. The failure of previous attempts to fight poverty in Africa was specifically addressed in the paper. For example

... billions of dollars of aid have been ploughed into Africa over the past few decades without reversing its decline ... One prod to action will come from a U.N. conference in September that's supposed to figure out why progress toward the Millennium Development Goals - some simple measures of success in fighting poverty - has been so lousy. In 2000, nearly every country in the world signed up to meet the goals in 2015, but not much has happened since.

Ellis (2007) also argued that poverty, especially in underdeveloped countries, has been an international concern since the formation of the United Nations. In spite of more than 50 years of 'concern', little has been achieved.

A recurring theme in the literature has been corruption. An implicit assumption embedded in the concept of corruption is indebtedness. At the crux of narratives on corruption is different cultural understandings, visibilities and expectations of indebtedness. Roitman (2003) argues that debt is the absence of wealth or a mediating device in societies for not having enough. The debt itself represents a social relationship. Roitman (2003) argues that this relationship is more than a functionalist one, and is a means of affirming or denying sociability.

Richards et al. referred to "the human psychology of 'lootocracy' (government by fraudsters) – its insatiable greed content and the instincts to protect both the loot and its sources" and argued that it was the source of corruption in the African sub-region of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). According to Richards et al. (p.308)

It is public knowledge that public servants, including military officers, serving and retired (who held sway in much of SAA in the last three decades), are richer than their countries – their

sources of wealth traceable only to the fact that they held public office at one point or the other (Ayittey, 1999). Almost always the fruits of these corrupt enrichments are stashed away in foreign bank accounts in the developed world.

Ayittey (1999), Richards et al (2003) and Ellis (2007) all demonstrate that corruption in the form of cronyism, nepotism and personal enrichment through the redirection of the proceeds of foreign aid and loans to personal bank accounts on the part of government leaders and elites have been well known for decades but effectively ignored by the providers of aid and loans. Richards et al (2003, citing the World Bank, 2001) provide the example of Mobutu Sese Seku who raised some \$12 billion in foreign debt in the name of the Republic of Congo (formerly, Zaire). More than \$4 billion was redirected to Mobutu's personal accounts leaving "the people of ... a once-wealthy country, ... pauperized" (Ayittey, 1999). Of equal concern is the waste of foreign aid and loans on projects that sound good in principal but of little or no benefit to the recipients.

Furthermore, Ayittey (1999) cites instances of the commitment of foreign aid and loans to "black elephants" (grandiose projects) or projects without economic benefit to the regions to which funds were allocated. The "black elephants" included "basilicas, grandiose monuments, grand conference halls, and show airports" (Ayittey 1999). Other foreign aid "blunders" cited by Ayittey (1999) include silos built in remote locations not visited by peasant farmers (US aid to Senegal), a fully-automated modern bakery without flour with which to bake bread (Canada aid to Tanzania), a banana-boxing plant where the break-even production point exceeded the output of bananas (Italy aid to Somalia), and a fish-freezing plant in a country where goats were raised (Norwegian aid to Turkana).

Such examples come from the power of donors to specify the use and terms of the gifts which are embedded with donor expectations, values, economic motivations and cultural premises. Accountability needs to move away from donor domination of accountability requirements as a moral imperative. This demands radical social change outside existing market and political structures (Dillard 1991). The following section proposes the alternate framework of gifting theory as informing an accountability framework outside an economic rationalist view.

##### **5. The idea of the gift.**

A gifting relationship is established when something in it or of it cannot be reciprocated or paid back. Reciprocity is not essential when a gift is given, such as is the case of a blood donor (Boundas 2001). This is very different to the concept of an exchange or economic transaction. An economic transaction implies equivalence, equilibrium, and reciprocity. In an economic transaction something is given in anticipation of receiving something, for example labour for wages. Such an exchange does not have to be simultaneous but can occur over time and involve more than one person. This is different to a gift because a gift can never be a zero sum game (Boundas 2001).

In an era of globalization accounting and technology when combined, facilitate an immediate distance relationship between donors and recipients, in which donors are

remote from the recipient(s) of their donation and from the consequences of their donations at work. Accountability systems that are used by the donors and imposed on the recipients of the donations allow a reductionism of the gifting relationship to an economic representation, and provide anonymity and distance for the donor. Responsibilities for gifting relationships are subjugated to financial accountability with a premise of reciprocity in the form of accountability and good governance. This results in an enforced privileging of capitalist concepts of exchange that are embedded in the accounting and accountability calculus over social concepts of giving and the gift. In this way morality in giving is subjugated to a rationalist system of representation. Systems of accounting and accountability, while only able to capture a financial relationship, are substituted as adequate symbolic representations of more complex social gifting relationships.

Boundas (2001) argues that theories of the gift are often confused with theories of exchange. Explanations of exchange from economic rationalist perspectives demand equivalence in the exchange, as is demonstrated in the equilibrium point of supply and demand. For example, positive accounting theory's explanation for the presence of accounting standards is that the number and nature of what accounting standards are supplied are the result of a market demand for accounting regulation (Watts and Zimmerman 1990). The seller exchanges a commodity for something of equivalent value. This functionalist view has several underpinning assumptions, that individuals are fully informed when establishing the value of the item(s) exchanged. Individuals are assumed to be utility maximizers, and individuals meet in the exchange on an equal basis in a stable environment (Watts and Zimmerman 1990). Traders are utility maximizers where it is assumed that the market price captures all relevant aspects of exchange.

This is juxtaposed against the idea of a gift, which relies on disequilibrium in exchange. The assumptions of economic exchange do not hold in a gifting relationship. Ideally, a pure gift occurs when individuals give anonymously where there is no possibility for reciprocity from the recipient. One very close example to this is blood donations. Silk (2004) argues that the purest form of the gift is unattainable, for example even blood donors have a low level expectation of reciprocity in anticipating blood products will be available for them if it is needed. Derrida (1992) argues that the idea of an altruistic gift assumes a free will and not causality.

It is the identity and values of the owner embedded in the gift (making a gift more than a commodity in exchange) that creates and inscribes a moral geography between donor and recipient (Silk 2004). In the case of Live 8 and the G 8 this encompasses aid relationships connecting donors in the North with recipients, in these examples, in the African states. The ontological assumption underlying these relationships is universalism as compunction for moral motivation. The assumption is altruistic. All humans are entitled to justice in all forms, including economic rights. Silk argues "secular organizations can trace their inspirations for caring back to Enlightenment humanism. This is different to nearest and dearest caring because it is between stranger relationships where donor and carer never meet. This is universalism as a basis for moral motivation" (Silk 2004, p.231).

Boundas (2001) suggests that most gifting is less than its purest ultraistic form, proposing gifting theory assumes that people give because they expect to receive and that people return the gift because they fear others will stop giving. Unlike advanced market exchanges, the whole function optimally operates in a state of disequilibrium. A gift donor relies on the recipient being in debt for the reciprocity. If this is paid back in equivalent value there is no longer a gifting relationship, and so the social relationship unravels and consequently no longer exists (Boundas 2001). Gifts where the donor is dominant in a relationship require lower levels of reciprocity than economic exchange. However, there is often rhetoric of partnership and participation (Silk 2004). This is evident in the following statement from a G 8 document at the 2005 summit which states “the fundamental aim of the plan is to mobilize technical and financial assistance so that, by 2010, African partners are able to act more effectively to prevent and resolve violent conflict on the continent, and undertake peace support operations in accordance with the United Nations Charter” (Chapter 1, paragraph 11, G 8 Progress report 2005).

Deleuze and Guattari (1977) argue that the circulation of gifts with an expectation of lower levels of reciprocity form the basis of societies that are not advanced capitalist markets. Such a relationship Deleuze and Guattari argue is neither based on any value in exchange nor any value in use. Rather, any exchange is valued by both parties as a calculation of risk in crossing the limit of expected reciprocity. For example, if recipients do not reciprocate with adequate accountability and governance as defined by the donor, the gifting relationship will cease. However, if equivalent accountability and corporate governance capability is achieved, the gifting relationship is no longer needed. While commodities can be exchanged, a gift subsumes the identity of the giver.

Bourdieu (as cited in Silk 2004, p.234) argues that gifts have a political dimension, where any expressions of concern, or acts of generosity that cannot be repaid set up a permanent asymmetry. Such caring from a distance makes use of intermediaries. Such intermediaries as Live 8, G 8 and **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** institutionalize and perpetuate an asymmetry between the recipients in African states and the donors in the North. Silk argues donor domination means that the donors and their intermediaries have power to specify the use and terms of gifted resources. This includes control over forms of accountability (Silk 2004, p.235).

Integral to a gifting relationship, neither the gift itself is reciprocated equally, nor is any donor accountability or donor legitimacy. “Motivations derived from commercial and political interests predominate...(aid) has been used to further a new liberal agenda of deregulation allied with a drive for improved governance and moves towards the political model of Western liberal democracy” (Silk 2004, p.236). In such relationships the rules and institutional frameworks favour private financial interests that cannot share reciprocity of accountability to the public interest. This causes the perpetuation of the asymmetry. An example of this is contracts that must be placed with firms located in donor countries, termed “boomerang aid”. A further example is the acknowledge politicization and economic consequences of accounting standards (Rappaport 1977, Zeff 1978).

Similarly, Silk (2004) argues that cultural and economic difference offer a critique of the ontological assumption of universalism used to explain gifting. Cultural and economic differences also challenge the ontological singularity of economic rationalism in economic exchanges. Silk (2004) questions whether caring should be based on the similarities or differences between persons? His point is that universal values are axiomatic and normative and as such are determined by the powerful. This is problematic, because as is the case in the Live 8 and G 8 circumstance, they impose Northern values. Universalism subjugates indigenous constructions of value. Universalism becomes a representation of differentiations of power. Tvedt (1998, p225) argues it is difficult to care for the other without invading the other. This is relevant because when we act at a distance, those geographically far away from us are vulnerable to our actions. Such new cross-cultural connections, amplified by technology enabling rapid global communications, demand a new moral accountability which is cognizant of and responsive to particular social and power relations between donors and recipients.

## **6. Conclusions**

Accountability of the North avoids social responsibility by denying culturally determined legitimate meanings of value other than those constructed from an economic perspective. This paper argues for a distinction between an economic relationship and a gifting relationship between states of different stages of market development. A gifting relationship is exemplified in the Live 8 and G 8 movements because scarce resources are given anonymously and there is no possibility for reciprocity from the recipients.

Accounting and its associated accountability is not neutral and objective in its universal application. Rather it has emerged to privilege the lexicon of economic exchange and is inculcated with assumptions of economic rationalism, demanding equilibrium and reciprocity in value exchanges. The narrative of Live 8 and G 8 demonstrates a moral rather than a financial concept of accountability. Both movements, while well-intentioned, are inevitably compromised because they are geopolitically situated in advanced capitalist states. Therefore, they must engage on a financial basis that situates the donor in the same position as the investor in the accounting calculus. This basis is ontologically singular and so does not permit sufficient accountability to the recipients and the public interests as would be the case if a wider sense of stewardship was enabled. Mechanisms for accountability are couched in terms of market exchange and financial constructs of value. Accordingly, such mechanisms do not provide accountability to recipients from donors.

Such a view is premised from the position of owing accountability purely in financial terms to the individual or investor rather than a society. It is embedded with the standard economic rationalist assumptions and contributes little to enhancing gifting relationships across moral geographies. This paper argues for a broader form of stewardship from each party to gifting relationships. The broader concept of stewardship should be designed to better capture qualitative and cultural impacts from the perspectives of both donors and recipients.

### *A different accountability*

The vision of accountability from a gifting perspective offers the following possibilities. First, the accounting representation should not equate the donor with an investor of capital, as the returns expected have both social and financial characteristics. The donor should not be in the same place in the accounting calculus as the investor. The broader concept of stewardship in line with the symbolic order or feudal era of simulacra is supported. This would mean a use of qualitative social impact statements, including justification for aid projects to avoid the “black elephants” and make transparent the effectiveness of the aid. These impact statements should be both from the donor and the recipient to achieve full disclosure. It is suggested that the equity statement be expanded to differentiate and include a section of social capital investment, including intergenerational investments in social capital. To make visible the difference in power relations resulting from different stages of economic strength, the development of a reciprocity statement will make visible the social relations of any transactions. This makes transparent any self serving aid of a donor.

The deficiencies of these suggestions are the limited ability to identify and reliably measure social outcomes. The suggestions, while enhancing disclosure, do nothing to solve the problems stemming from differing positions of political power from both the recipient and donor perspectives. The suggestions also rely on considerable technical development.

Northern attributes of accounting and accountability have been critiqued and found wanting from the perspectives of gifting relationships and the public interest. Gifting relationships rely on disequilibrium in exchange and more than quantitative representations of value. All of these concepts are adopted from the perspective of the North and have no ability to capture any qualitative forms of accountability. As such they are simulacra for accountability and good governance but do not engage in an authentic way with those in a donor/recipient relationship. A broader concept of stewardship is forfeited to sustain the disequilibrium and maintain the power of the economic elite.

### Notes

1. **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** is an international coalition of aid agencies, community groups and celebrities, who run a secular campaign for trade justice and debt forgiveness.
2. The forty seven countries comprising the continent of Africa are Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Congo D.R., Cote d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
3. Live aid was a multi venue rock (London, Philadelphia, Sydney and Moscow) concert held on 13 July 1985. It was broadcast via satellite to television linkups with an estimated viewing audience of 1.5 billion people across 100 countries.

4. North - Of or relating to the north; coming from the north; of a northern type or character (Oxford English Dictionary). In this case the European economies North of Africa.

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